

Life at Home: The Covenant

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- [0 : 00] If we could, this evening for a short while, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, Ephesians chapter 5.
- Ephesians chapter 5, and we're going to look at the few verses that we read. But if we just read again at verse 22, Ephesians 5 at verse 22, where Paul writes, And so on.
- Last Friday afternoon, I crossed the Minch to attend the induction of the Reverend Ian McCritchie. And as you know, Ian is no stranger to us here in Barvis, because when we were both on the church development track, Ian and I used to do many pulpit swaps on a Sunday evening.
- But now Ian has moved from the sheep fields of Gravar to the suburbs of Greyfriars. As you know, an induction service, it's often compared to a wedding.
- That's why in our island tradition, we often refer to an induction as a pausseh, or a wedding. And I suppose you could say that there are some comparisons, because, well, although it's changed a lot probably since I was inducted 10 years ago.
- [1 : 47] But for the most part, an induction, it's a happy occasion where there are lots of guests, just like there was on Friday night. There were lots of guests from near and far, and there's a cake, and there's speeches.
- But as it is with a wedding, or at a pausseh, an induction, it's not all about the after party, because the marriage is usually the main event. But at an induction, and unfortunately for Ian, as a single man, there were no rings to exchange, and there was no bride to kiss.
- But commitment was made, and a covenant was entered into. Commitment was made, and a covenant was entered into. And I suppose that's where we get the concept of calling an induction a pausseh.
- That's where it really comes from. Because whether at a wedding or at an induction, there's commitment, and there's a covenant. There's commitment, and there's a covenant. At an induction, there's commitment from the congregation.
- They are the ones who have signed the call for the minister. They've put their name to that minister, and they are ultimately vowing before God that they, this is what they sign in the call, they invite, call, and entreat him, or Ian McCritchie, to undertake the office of pastor among us, and the charge of our souls.
- [3 : 08] And further, and upon accepting this our call, we promise you all dutiful respect, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord. So that's also what many of you said and signed about 10 years ago, and I still have the paper to prove it.
- And so there's commitment. There's commitment from a congregation when they sign a call. But there's also a covenant at an induction when a minister vows before God, and also in the sight of the congregation.
- He makes the vow. It's one of his last vows. There's 10 vows. And the last vow is that he accepts off and closes with the call to be pastor of this congregation, and promises through grace to perform all the duties of a faithful minister of the gospel among this people.

And so it's a posse. It's a posse. There's commitment and there's a covenant. But of course, here in this passage in Ephesians chapter 5, Paul isn't referring to the relationship between a pastor and his people.

He's referring to the relationship between a husband and his wife. Because that relationship, just like the relationship between a pastor and its people, that relationship requires commitment and a covenant.

[4 : 27] The relationship between a husband and a wife requires commitment and a covenant. And there are two headings this evening. Commitment and covenant. Commitment and covenant.

So first of all, commitment. Commitment where Paul says there in verse 22, Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its saviour.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Now as you know, Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we've said it before, it's split into two sections.

So chapters 1 to 3 is the first half. Chapters 4 to 6 is the second half. Chapters 1 to 3, Paul is teaching. 4 to 6, Paul is telling. 1 to 3, Paul is giving information.

Chapters 4 to 6, he's giving application. Chapters 1 to 3 is full of indicatives, and it's amazing how many indicatives there are. And then chapters 4 to 6 are full of imperatives, and we've seen how many imperatives Paul is using.

[5 : 37] So chapters 1 to 3 are full of encouragements, and chapters 4 to 6 are full of exhortations. And in chapters 1 to 3, we've seen that Paul has encouraged us. We're encouraged because we're blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ.

That was chapter 1. In chapter 2, he encouraged us that we've been saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And it's all, all of our salvation is to the glory of God alone.

In chapter 3, Paul has encouraged us. He's told us that we are loved. Loved with the length and breadth and depth and height of God's love in Christ. So Paul has lovingly encouraged us in the first half of his letter, which leads him on to lovingly exhorting us.

He's told us how we are saved and blessed in Christ, and how he's wanting to teach us. He lovingly exhorts us through chapters 4 to 6.

And as we've seen, and as we've said before, Paul uses what we call a peripatetic illustration. An illustration of walking throughout the whole of chapter 4 and into the first half of chapter 5.

[6 : 51] He talks about walking because our Christian walk is important. It's important to our Christian witness. So he exhorts us at the beginning of chapter 4 to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called.

Then halfway through chapter 4, he tells us not to walk like the world or to walk with the world. And with that, Paul gave us their 11 imperatives in the second half of chapter 4.

11 exhortations to put off the world and to put on Christ. Then last week we were looking at the beginning of chapter 5, where Paul gives us even more exhortations.

Where he tells us that we're not to be imitators of what is graceless and godless, but we are to be imitators of God. And in order to prove his point, Paul gives us 20 in 20.

20 imperatives in 20 verses. He shows us and stresses to us how highly he regards our Christian walk in this world.

[7 : 57] Because for Paul, our Christian character, conduct, conversation and commitment to Christ is important to our Christian witness. And it's all because for Paul, the world is watching.

The world is watching the church. The world is watching. But now as Paul moves into the second half of chapter 5, and as we'll see, he's connecting into chapter 6, the first half of chapter 6.

Paul focuses our attention. He moves our attention away from what we are like as Christians in public. He now focuses upon what we are like as Christians in private.

Because Paul, he's already addressed, first half of chapter 4, beginning of chapter 5, he's addressed our Christian character, conduct, conversation and commitment to Christ in the privacy of our own home.

You know, Paul exhorts us in this area of our Christian life. Because for Paul, what we are in public must also be what we are in private.

[9 : 10] It's quite hard hitting. What we are like as a Christian in the eyes of the public must also be what we are like as a Christian in the privacy of our own home.

So what we are in public must also be what we are in private. And so here at the end of chapter 5 and to the beginning of chapter 6, Paul addresses, you could say, three areas of our private life.

Three areas that most people in church don't usually see. Our relationship to our spouse. That's the first thing he addresses. Our relationship with our children.

That's the second thing he'll address. We'll look at that next time. And also our relationship with our boss. So our relationship to our spouse, our children and our boss.

Or if you're addicted to alliteration like I am, you have the covenant, the clan and the company. The covenant, the clan and the company.

[10 : 07] That's what Paul is addressing. And he's saying to us, what you are in public must also be what you are in private. But this evening, as I said, we're considering the covenant. Because when it comes to our relationship with our spouse, the covenant that we enter into in marriage, it requires commitment.

The covenant requires commitment. That's why Paul gives us this exhortation. First of all, to wives and to women about submission. He says there, verse 22.

Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its saviour.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their own husbands. Now as you know, and as you'd expect by now, Paul exhorts wives and he exhorts women straight away with an imperative.

He uses another imperative. Wives, submit. That's the imperative. Submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. Now as you know, in our permissive and our progressive 21st century, there are many females and there are many feminists who hate the concept of commitment in the form of submission.

[11 : 36] I remember meeting an engaged couple a number of years ago, just before they got married. They weren't Christians, but we met to discuss their marriage vows, as you do with all couples that you're marrying.

But before I could even say anything about the marriage vows, and before the wife-to-be even read the marriage vows, while sitting beside her husband-to-be, she strongly stated, and I'll never forget what she said, I will not vow to being submissive to my husband.

I thought, wow, you're bold. I will not vow to being submissive to my husband. Now obviously she had been watching too many American rom-coms, because thankfully for her, and thankfully for him sitting beside her, the vows that I use don't mention the word submissive or submit.

They use the words loving, faithful, and dutiful. Loving, faithful, and dutiful. Because that's actually what the biblical concept of submission is.

Loving, faithful, and dutiful. It's not about a wife being slavishly serving her spouse at the stove. It's about supporting her spouse.

[12 : 57] Supporting her spouse by being loving, faithful, and dutiful. It's about supporting her spouse by being loving, faithful, and dutiful.

But you know, in the world, and sadly in the church, there are many people who misread and even misunderstand Paul's teaching.

To the point that they would probably ridicule Paul and regard Paul as a misogynist. Because he's the apostle who says no. He says no to everything to do with women.

That's how most people view Paul. He's the guy who says no to everything to do with women. No women ministers. No women elders. No women deacons. No women praying.

No women preaching. No women speaking. And with that, they see Paul as nothing more than this angry apostle who's an oppressive ogre against women. In fact, and just to prove the point, I remember doing an essay when I was studying for my first degree in HTC, the Highland Theological College in Dingwall.

[14 : 07] And it was a New Testament essay, and it had the very provocative question, was Paul a misogynist? That was the essay question. Was Paul a misogynist?

What's interesting and what's probably more intriguing is that there was one other person in my class, so we had a choice of essay questions, and two of us chose that question.

Was Paul a misogynist? The other person who chose the same question as me was also a ministry candidate, but for the Church of Scotland. And as you can guess, she came to a completely different conclusion to me.

You know, the Paul I read in the Bible, this one who seeks to serve the Lord faithfully and fearlessly. And the Paul that is often portrayed by other people is not the Paul I read, because this Paul, he's committed to God's Word, God's will, and God's way for ordering and organizing the Church of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the Paul I read, and I hope you read in the Bible, he isn't a moody misogynist that's angry and averse to women. He's actually the complete opposite.

[15 : 23] Because as we said, when Paul exhorts engaged women and wives to submit to their husbands, he's not saying that a spouse is to slavishly serve her husband at the stove.

Rather, a spouse, Paul says, is to be supportive by being loving, faithful, and dutiful. Because the biblical concept of commitment in the form of submission, it's not about slavery or service.

It's about being supportive. It's about being a supportive spouse. Neither is submission about lording it over your spouse. It's about loving and looking after your spouse.

Because biblical submission isn't about showing your spouse who's in control. It's about showing your spouse that you care. It's about showing your spouse that you want to show them compassion, and you want to have a concern towards them.

And you know, when we understand the biblical concept of commitment in the form of submission, as Paul teaches it, we then understand the theological teaching of complementarianism.

[16 : 35] Great word. Complementarianism. This is opposed to egalitarianism, which believes that men and women are equal in both form and function.

Whether we're created equal, so egalitarianism believes that we were created equal, therefore we should have equal roles and responsibilities of leadership in the church and at home.

But that's not the biblical view. That's not the view that Paul teaches here. And he also teaches in other parts of Scripture. Because the complementarianism view is that men and women, they're equal in form, so they were created equal in the sight of God, but they differ in function.

The complementarian view is that men and women are equal in form, but differ in function. So men and women, they're created equal in the sight of God, so we're all one.

But God has given men and women different functions, different roles, different responsibilities, both in the church and at home. And these roles and responsibilities, they're not a contest, they're not a competition.

[17 : 45] They are, as the teaching suggests, they are to complement. To complement one another in our service to the Lord, both in church and at home.

And so the biblical concept of commitment and complementarianism in the form of submission, it's not about slavery, it's not about service of a spouse, it's about being supportive.

It's about working together. It's about supporting one another. It's about being a supportive spouse. Working, as Paul suggests, as a body.

just like Christ is the head of the church and we are his body. But then Paul moves on. In verse 25, he moves on to the men, which we consider under our second heading, covenant.

So there's commitment and there's covenant. Commitment and covenant. Covenant. He says in verse 25, Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing.

[19 : 08] That she might be holy and without blemish. Now, one of the privileges of being a minister, and there are many privileges of being a minister, but one of them is being able to conduct a marriage ceremony of a happy couple.

Because, well, I get the best view. I get the best view of the bride and groom and I see all the shy smiles and all the looks of love and even all the tearful touches that they have with one another that the congregation can't really see.

But I also have the privilege of uniting the couple, the happy couple, in marriage together, before God, and also in the presence of all these witnesses.

But usually during a marriage ceremony, I would usually explain three things about marriage under three headings.

And of course, they would have to have alliteration. So there's creation, there's covenant, and there's Christ. Creation, covenant, and Christ. Creation, well, because marriage is a creation ordinance.

[20 : 14] It's not something that was ordered and ordained by the Scottish government. It was ordered and ordained by God at creation. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman.

That's why Paul quotes from Genesis chapter 2 there in verse 31. You see that he's quoting something. He's quoting verse 31. He's quoting Genesis 2. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

That's what marriage is. You're no longer two. You're one flesh. I think before Alison and I got married, we were given a book each and the book was called No Longer Two.

And that's the emphasis. You are in marriage. You are one flesh. And just like the creation, you could say, wasn't complete until God provided Eve for Adam.

So too, marriage between a man and a woman is a declaration that they complete one another and they complement one another and they want to care for one another.

[21 : 22] And you know, at every wedding, I always go back to Matthew Henry. Matthew Henry is very quotable. And I always go back to that 17th century Puritan because he says about marriage, this is what he says, the woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam, not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled on by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected by him, and near his heart to be loved by him.

And that's the kind of marriage that God has created. But during a marriage ceremony, I would not only explain marriage in relation to creation, I'd also explain marriage in relation to covenant.

Because a covenant, as you know, and we'll look at this more on Sunday evening, a covenant, as you know, is a promise between two parties. It's a legally binding contract between a couple.

More than that, a covenant, it's a word that's used throughout the Bible in order to express and explain God's plan of salvation. It's where we talk about a covenant of redemption or a covenant of grace.

But marriage is also a covenant because it's a promise between two parties. They make vows to one another in the presence of God and before witnesses.

[22 : 45] And you know, this is why Paul wrote, he wrote in 1 Corinthians 13 about the prominence of love and the permanence of love.

He wrote in that great chapter of love in 1 Corinthians 13, he sets before us the example of Jesus, the one who is altogether lovely. But he tells us as the church and as Christians that love bears all things.

Love believes all things. Love hopes all things. Love endures all things. And then Paul says, love never ends. Love never ends. And that's what a covenant of love is meant to be.

It's not to end. That's why a wedding, it's not only a special occasion, it's a solemn occasion. And it's a solemn occasion because a couple, they covenant with one another that they will faithfully keep their vows.

And I always try and make the couple say this, repeat their vows until God shall separate them by death. My friend, marriage is based upon creation.

[23 : 53] It's bound in a covenant and it's beautified by Christ. Marriage is based upon creation, bound in a covenant and beautified by Christ.

And that's what Paul is seeking to show us here. That our marriage is beautified by Christ when wives support their husbands and husbands love their wives.

How? As Christ loved the church. And you know, far too often, some people think that Paul gives women and wives a hard time when he talks about submission.

But you know, when you go to verse 25, when Paul speaks to men and he speaks to husbands, he sets the standard much, much higher.

Because to love your wife as Christ loved the church, it's a high calling. A really high calling.

[24 : 58] As Christians, we all know that Christ loved the church and Paul says that here. He loved the church and gave himself up for her. He substituted himself for her.

He sacrificed himself for her. We all know, as Christians, we all know what Jesus said in John 15, that greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

So we all know that the love of Christ for his bride, the church, it's a submissive love. It's a selfless love. It's a sacrificial love. It's a substitutionary love.

And so when Paul says to us, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, Paul is saying, husband, husband, that's the love you are to display and demonstrate to your wife.

Now you might be thinking, well, Paul, you weren't married, you don't know what it's like to be married. But Paul looked at Christ as the example of loving his bride, the church.

[26 : 00] And he could see that submission and selflessness and being sacrificial and substitutionary, all these things that display and demonstrate the love of Christ.

Paul says, husband, that's what you are to display and demonstrate to your wife. It's a high calling. A high calling.

That's why I struggle preaching on these passages. But we have to preach on them. And you know, I read a quote a while back by another Paul.

He's an American preacher and pastor called Paul Washer. And you know, every time I read the quote, it reminds me of the standard and how far short I fall.

Because Paul Washer, he wrote about husbands and you could say he wrote two husbands. And this is what he said. Husbands, treat your wife better than you treat anything or anyone.

[27 : 03] That's your covenant with God. That's your first ministry. To love her the way Christ loves the church is a high calling. If you fail at that, you've failed at everything.

I'll read it again because I found it so challenging. Treat your wife, husbands, treat your wife better than you treat anything or anyone. That's your covenant with God.

That's your first ministry. To love her the way Christ loves the church is a high calling. If you fail at that, you've failed at everything. You know, my friend, I don't know what any of you are like in private.

I know what you're like in public, but I don't know what you're like in private. Thing is, I don't need to know. I don't need to know because, well, the Lord knows and the Lord sees.

You're not accountable to me, you're accountable to Him. Which is why Paul is addressing us and advising us this evening from God's Word that what we are in public must also be what we are in private.

[28 : 12] What we are in public must also be what we are in private, especially when it comes to our relationship with our spouse. Because our covenant in marriage, as Paul teaches us, it requires commitment.

Our covenant in marriage requires commitment. commitment. Now the time has gone and so as we conclude, I just want to give the final word to my good friend J.C. Ryle.

He was actually married three times. He married three times. His first two wives died young. But J.C. Ryle, he gave three rules for a happy marriage.

This is a man who spoke from experience. Three rules for a happy marriage. The first, he says, marry only in the Lord and after prayer for God's approval and blessing.

The second, this is one I love, the second is not to expect too much from your partner and to remember that marriage, after all, is the union of two sinners, not the union of two angels.

[29 : 17] The third rule is to strive first and foremost for one another's sanctification. He says, the more holy married people are, the happier they are.

The more holy married people are, the happier they are. It's a high calling, but Paul is reminding us in this section that when it comes to our relationship with our spouse, what we are in public must also be what we are in private.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we give thanks, Lord, for the teaching that is found in thy word.

We give thanks, Lord, that scripture addresses every area and aspect of life, not only our public life in church, but also our private life at home, the things that go on behind closed doors that only the Lord sees.

And help us then, we pray, to love our spouse, to love our wives as Christ loved the church, and to submit to our husbands as to the Lord.

[30 : 27] And Lord, we pray that thou wouldst enable us to have marriages that are God-honoring and God-glorifying. And we pray that thou wouldst protect our marriages, especially Christian marriages.

We know that they are often under attack, how often the devil wants to tear us apart, and Lord, how he wants to break down homes and break down families and break down marriages.

But Lord, that thou wouldst protect us, that thou wouldst keep us. remember, Lord, those whose husbands are out of Christ, or wives that are still strangers to grace and to God.

Lord, we ask that thou wouldst draw near to them. Remember others, Lord, of our congregation who have lost their spouse, and who for them their marriage was until God separated them by death.

But Lord, that thou wouldst be to them that husbandman as thou hast promised. Lord, the God who promises to be a father to the fatherless, and even a husband to the widow.

[31 : 28] So, Lord, comfort those who are mourning, that they would know thy grace to be sufficient. Oh, Lord, we need thee in every aspect of life, that we need thee, Lord, in all that we go through, in all that we do in life, whether in our homes or our families, or even in church.

Lord, help us, we pray, to live lives that are God-honoring, and God-glorifying, and Christ-exalting, all that we would seek first his kingdom and his glory, that everything else, Lord, would be secondary, that we would know that he has all the preeminence, and that he is receiving all the glory.

Do us good, and we pray, go before us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for his sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to our conclusion this evening, and we're going to sing once again from Psalm 45.

Psalm 45, it's in the Scottish Psalter. It's the second version of the psalm. So it's page 270 in the Blue Psalm book. Psalm 45.

Second version of the psalm, the short meter version. And we're singing from verse 13 down to the end of the psalm. As I said, this is a love song.

[32 : 52] It's, you could say, a marriage song, a wedding song, between, that ultimately presents to us the picture of Jesus and his bride, and how this is the description of the bride being brought in to the king.

The daughter of the king all glorious is within, and with embroideries of gold her garments wrought have been. She cometh to the king in robes with needle wrought.

The virgins that do follow her shall unto thee be brought. They shall be brought with joy and mirth on every side into the palace of the king, and there they shall abide.

I'm going to sing down to the end of the psalm of Psalm 45 to God's praise. The daughter of the king all glorious is within, and with them bride her ease of gold her garments wrought have been.

She cometh to the king in robes with needle wrought.

[34 : 26] The virgins that do follow her shall unto thee be brought.

They shall be brought with joy and birth on every side.

Enter the palace of the king, and there they shall abide.

I will be brought in thy father's stead, my children thou mayst pay.

I'll be in all places of the earth and noble princes may.

[35 : 37] I will show forth thy name to generations old.

Therefore the people evermore to keep the praise shall the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and
forever and now.

Amen. Amen.